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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TALLINN 000964

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EN](#)
SUBJECT: ESTONIA'S NEW PRESIDENT PART II: A MORE ASSERTIVE
FOREIGN POLICY

REF: A. TALLINN 00941

[1](#)B. TALLINN 00845

Classified By: by DCM Jeff Goldstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Newly-elected Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves has highlighted three foreign policy priorities for his presidency: helping to improve transatlantic relations, increasing Estonia's profile in and contributions to the European Union (EU) and development of a coherent and coordinated EU policy towards Russia. It is unclear how much Ilves will be able to deliver due to the constraints of his office, but Ilves will definitely use the bully pulpit of the presidency to push his ideas. End Summary.

Staunch Supporter of Good Trans-Atlantic Relations

[1](#)2. (C) Ilves has strong ties to the United States. Born to Estonian emigre parents, Ilves was raised in New Jersey and educated in U.S. universities. After Estonian re-independence, he served as Estonia's Ambassador to the United States from 1993 to 1996. Unsettled by rising anti-Americanism in Europe, Ilves has made efforts to strengthen transatlantic ties a high priority for his presidency. Prior to the election, Ilves consistently and publicly supported Estonia's participation in international peacekeeping operations. He has argued that Estonia's participation in Iraq and Afghanistan are important commitments in the context of Estonia's larger global security concerns and its NATO obligations (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) Ilves is considered a foreign policy heavyweight in Estonia, and he will likely take an active role in shaping domestic debate on key issues including Iraq. Ilves' supporters highlight the advantage of having a president who can articulate and explain Estonian foreign policy decisions to average Estonians. Some of his detractors, however, think Ilves' interest in foreign policy could marginalize Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and/or Prime Minister Andres Ansip's role. As Lea Kiivit, People Union's Secretary General said to us, "The last thing Estonia needs is three foreign ministers."

[1](#)4. (C) Even though Ilves has supported USG positions on key security issues (i.e., Iraq and Afghanistan), regional policy (assistance for Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova), and EU economic policy (i.e., Common Market reforms), he has demonstrated a maverick side to his character by not shying away from criticizing the United States. For example, although he supports Estonia's presence in Iraq, Ilves once publicly said that Estonia was "sold a bill of goods" on Iraq regarding the justification of the war when WMDs were not found. He has publicly criticized the USG's position on the

International Criminal Court. We understand that during internal meetings of the European Socialist Bloc within the European Parliament he has also criticized the U.S. position on the Kyoto Protocols and alleged human rights abuses in Guantanamo. He has also become more vocal on visa-waiver for Estonia. Ilves has pledged on a number of occasions to press for visa-waiver. Olari Koppel, Ilves' Advisor, said to us that Ilves' position is firmly backed by the majority of Estonians. "This is an important issue for the President," commented Koppel, "and he will remind Americans that terrorists are not coming out of Estonia as they do in some visa-waiver countries."

A Good European...of Sorts

15. (U) From 2004 to 2006, Ilves was a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) where he served as Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs Committee. As an MEP, Ilves was active in EU-Russian relations, EU-U.S. relations, EU neighborhood policy (concerning Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and the Balkans), energy security, and human rights. Ilves worked hard in Brussels to develop his European bona fides through his work on the Foreign Affairs Committee while also positioning himself as one of the more well known MEPs from the new member states.

16. (C) Ilves' transatlanticism, as well as his defense of the United States' role in European security, has often put him at odds with MEPs from his own European party, the European Socialist Group. Previously, Ilves complained to us about the "whacky leftists" in the European Socialist party he has butted heads with --

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comparing their mindset and "knee-jerk anti-Americanism" to former Soviet times.

17. (SBU) While in Brussels, Ilves took active part in debates over high profile EU issues, often making allies across the political spectrum from Euro-Federalists (to Euro-Skeptics. Ilves argued in favor of a common EU foreign policy, a common position on energy security, and the adoption of the European Constitution. At the same time, he often supported initiatives to lighten the regulatory burden on businesses and industries in the Common Market (i.e., the Services Directive, the Financial Services Action Plan, and the Lisbon Agenda).

18. (SBU) Like other new members, Estonia has been reticent to press its interests too forcefully, to take an active position on broader EU issues or to criticize the EU. However, Ilves wants Estonia to have a more vocal and active presence in Brussels. Soon after he was elected President he announced his intentions to place Estonia "among the generators of ideas in Europe," to speak up in EU debates on behalf of Estonia and aspirant countries, and to help increase the influence of the EU's new member countries in the formulation of common EU policy.

Addressing Moscow through Brussels

19. (SBU) Ilves has made clear in public remarks and writings that he believes Russia's western border marks a line between contrasting civilizations and conflicting world views. He is an advocate for stronger EU support for democratization and market reform efforts in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, in order to draw these countries out of Russia's orbit. Ilves has said that foreign relations with Russia should be conducted via the EU. He has criticized the EU's current approach to Russia as piecemeal and incoherent and expressed concern that

Russia is effectively utilizing its traditional "divide-and-conquer" approach to get what it wants. Ilves has expressed his desire to work with the European Commission and other member states to unify the EU's approach to Russia.

¶11. (U) In one of his first speeches in the European Parliament in 2004, Ilves warned the EU against withdrawing into a "fortress Europe" by commenting on the "yawning economic, social, legal and political gulf between the European Union and (its) new neighbors." He called on the EU to direct more resources towards these countries and resist the growing "enlargement fatigue" among the older member states. Shutting the door for future EU enlargement, according to Ilves, would only hurt vulnerable democratic countries. It would also reduce the pressure on undemocratic countries like Belarus to change. For Ilves, any retreat by the EU in the region would constitute abandoning these countries to Russia.

¶12. (C) Comment. Though Ilves has raised the bar of expectations, it is unclear how much he can actually deliver due to the constitutional constraints of his office. However, it is clear that he will use his office to speak out often and forcefully in favor of the policies and ideas he considers important. End Comment.
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